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Revisiting the Position of Grammar in Communicative Language Teaching: A Study

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Objectives of This Paper

- To explore and analyze the acceptance of Communicative Language Teaching in the Second Language teaching-learning method of present era.
- To promote the progress and uphold the cause of research in higher education.
- To explore challenges in teaching English language and learning process.
- To evaluate the role of Grammar in CLT.
- To explore and promote research on the status, scope and challenges of teaching English for employment in the global perspective.

Developments in Communicative Language Teaching

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Revisiting the Position of Grammar in Communicative Language Teaching: A Study

By the end of 1960s, English language teaching witnessed drastic changes with the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) of English as a foreign or second language. The communicative approach in English language teaching has attracted world-wide attention. It has been taken into consideration that language is essentially a tool for communication. It stresses real meaningful communication rather than mere activities or situations. It does not create an artificial or remote context from students' life but access on the real or live materials.

The communicative Language Teaching has brought about revolution of thoughts and ideas. Some of the famous linguists have acknowledged that our past efforts of teaching language have been failures because of the conception or misconception of the notion as well as function of language. They argue that in traditional language teaching, too much importance has been given to structures and lexical items – but has not yielded any fruitful results. One of the crucial aspects of CLT is the controversial position of grammar in the teaching learning process.

Change in Teaching Traditions

The entry of Communicative Language Teaching in the teaching of English language marks the changes in the British Language teaching tradition from late 1960s. Up to that, situational language teaching gained prominence over any other method of teaching English. It concentrated on basic structures in meaningful situation-based activities. By that time Audio-lingual Method was dejected completely from American suburbs in the mid 1960s. Another reason for its entry was the changing educational reality in Europe. It encouraged people to conduct conferences on language teaching and learning, to publish books and monographs which emphasized the need to develop alternative methods of teaching .They demanded a new method which is different from other methods like the audio–lingual or situational. Hence, the communicative approach to language teaching has become popular in many countries including the United States.

Functional or Communicative Syllabus

Analyzing the needs of European language learners, a group of experts began to delve deep into the possibility of developing language courses on a unit-credit system. A preliminary

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document for this purpose was prepared by a British linguist, D.A. Wilkins (1972), which proposed a functional or communicative syllabus for language teaching. His contribution was an analysis of the communicative meanings that a language learner needs to understand and express. He has enlisted a system of meanings that describe the core of language not through traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary but through system of meaning which stresses communicative uses of language. Later, Wilkins revised and expanded his document into *Notional syllabuses* (1976), a book which had a great impact on the development of communicative language teaching.

In short, the work of Council of Europe, the writings of Wilkins, Widdowson, Candlin, Christopher Brumfit, Keith Johnson and other applied linguists gave impetus to the theoretical basis for a communicative or functional approach to language teaching. The rapid application of these ideas by text book writers and the equally rapid acceptance of these new principles by British language teaching specialists, curriculum development centres, and even governments, aided the theory's existence to the fullest extent.

Centrality of Communicative Competence

K Johnson and K Morrow define Communicative Language Teaching as one which recognizes the teaching of communicative competence as its valid aim. "It is on this level of aim that such a language teaching distinguishes from more traditional approaches where the emphasis is on teaching structural competence". (1996:51) One of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language and encourages us to go beyond structures and take account of other aspects of communication. It can therefore help us to match the content more closely with the actual communicative uses that the learners will have to make use of the foreign language. In communicative language teaching, almost everything is done with a communicative intent; students use the language a great deal through communicative activities such as games, role plays and problem solving tasks. The communicative language teaching stresses the use of authentic materials. It is considered desirable to give students an opportunity to develop strategies for understanding language actually used by native speakers.

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The central theoretical concept in communicative language teaching is rooted in “communicative competence” a term introduced into discussions of teaching of second or foreign language in early 1970s. It is also an expansion of the early definition of competence given by Noam Chomsky in 1965. The term originally introduced by Dell Hymes which includes knowledge, skills and abilities in the concept of communication; whether or not (and to what degree) an utterance is formally possible, feasible, appropriate and actually performed. Actually different writers infuse different meaning to this -- depending on context. Widdowson has deviated considerably from the original meaning of the term by playing down the role of grammatical competence. The communicative approaches which follow from the view typically emphasize ‘use’ but de-emphasize grammaticality. Hymes used this term while recording his reaction to Chomsky’s theory of competence. Chomsky stated:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitation, distractions, shifts of attention and interest and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance (1965.3).

Abstract Abilities

Chomsky gave more emphasis to the possession of the abstract abilities of speakers of language which enable them to produce grammatically correct sentences in that language. Hymes denies the view of Chomsky. He suggests that linguistic theory be seen as part of a more general theory incorporating common and culture. Taking Chomsky’s dichotomy between ‘competence’ and ‘performance’ as the point of departure, Hymes points out that grammatical competence is not a sufficient basis for communication. Communicative competence includes the knowledge of how to use language appropriately in given situations in given cultural contexts in order to achieve desired objective. He further suggested the direction for the study of notions and functions by referring to the complex mappings between grammatical forms and their notional functional purposes. Of course, it is a much more comprehensive and plausible

theory of language use than Chomsky's view of Competence. Hymes focus was not language teaching but language as social behaviour.

Halliday and Widdowson

Halliday and Widdowson are the two eminent scholars who contributed much to the theoretical base to the communicative approach to language teaching. Listing the functional account of language use, Halliday states that "Linguisticis concerned.....with the description of speech acts or texts, since only through the study of language in use are all the functions of language and therefore all components of meaning, brought into focus" (Halliday, 1970.145). The use of language is stressed.

Hymes' Proposal

Hymes' 'communicative competence' can be seen as the equivalent of Halliday's 'meaning potential'. He has listed seven basic functions that the first language performs for children.

1. Instrumental function: using language to get things
2. Regulatory function: using language to control the behaviour of others
3. The interactional function: using language to create interaction with others
4. The personal function: using language to express personal feelings and meanings
5. The heuristic function: using language to learn and discover
6. The imaginative function: using language to create a world of imagination
7. The representational function: using language to communicate Information.

(2001:160)

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119

In his view, child's second language too must serve the first and foremost purpose of communication.

Communicative Competence and Grammatical Competence

Communicative approach to language teaching views the learning of a second language also as acquiring linguistic means and ability to perform these various function. Its comprehensiveness makes the theory not only different in scope and status but also universally accepted as authoritative. The wide acceptance of the communicative approach and relatively varied way in which it is interpreted and applied can be attributed to the fact that practitioners from different educational traditions can identify with it, and consequently interpret it in different ways.

The term 'communicative competence' can be explained only in connection with the term grammatical competence. Before delving deep into the term grammatical competence we have to answer the question-'what is grammar'? Linguists define grammar as a set of components: phonetics (the production and perception of sounds), phonology (how sounds are combined), morphology (the study of forms, or how elements are combined to create words), syntax (how words are strung together into sentences), and semantics or meaning. All languages are characterized by these components, and hence, language does not exist without grammar. But the definition is often questioned by the teachers or learners. Grammar is often wrongly conceived to be a set of rules that govern language, primarily its morphology and syntax. But morphology and syntax are only two components of grammar. Viewing grammar with all its components makes the teachers and learners understand the real meaning of grammar and its function in the language. It really reduces the complexity of learning grammar and helps in the on-going process of learning. In order to possess mastery of a language i.e. produce the language spontaneously, they must have at least some knowledge about the construction of grammatical items of the language. This knowledge enables the learners to understand and make meaning in the communicative classroom and makes them proficient users of the target language.

Grammatical competence is knowledge of the language code, grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciations spellings, etc. i.e. it refers to the knowledge we have of a language that accounts for our ability to produce sentences in a language. It refers to knowledge of the building of sentences (e.g., parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses, sentence patterns) and how sentences are formed; of course, it is an important dimension in language learning. When the learner knows the rules of language exceptionally well but is not very successful at being able to use the language for meaningful communications, it is of no use. Grammatical competence is the ability to recognize and produce the distinctive grammatical structures of a language and to use them effectively in communication. In other words, it helps the user maintain consistent grammatical control of complex language system. For example, an average learner often confuses with the usage of tag questions, subject –verb agreement, use of gerunds and to-infinitives, etc. When the learners possess the grammatical competence, s/he can easily engage in meaningful communication.

Focal Point of Communicative Competence

Communicative competence as referred earlier is a concept introduced by Dell Hymes which was redefined by many authors. Communicative competence includes the following aspects of language knowledge:

- Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions
- Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication)
- Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations)
- Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies) (Richards, 2006.3).

The focal point of CLT was almost exclusively on meaningful interaction through the use of spontaneous speech during pair and/or group work. Combining grammar instruction with communicative techniques for communicative purposes helps the learners to master the communication skills in the target language.

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122

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